



# Venango County

## Courthouse Annex

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**Board of Commissioners**

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**Chief Clerk/Administrator**

Sabrina S. Backer

6/16/2023

U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
11296 Wood Duck Lane  
Guys Mills, PA 16327-9499  
Attention: French Creek Proposal

Dear Sir or Madam,

We write to you today in opposition to the United States Fish & Wildlife Service's (USFWS) proposed French Creek National Wildlife Refuge. As Venango County Commissioner, we have serious concerns about the potential impact of a wildlife refuge within our region.

The proposed refuge spans as far as 798,000 acres within the French Creek Watershed across five counties in Pennsylvania and New York. This would make the French Creek National Wildlife Refuge among the largest in the entire United States and the largest on the East Coast. Unlike traditional wildlife refuges, which encompass largely uninhabited and/or non-residential land, this proposed wildlife refuge cuts through many local communities and large areas of private property.

Traditionally, lands purchased to become part of a national wildlife refuge will be removed from the property tax rolls of the counties in question. Although USFWS reimburses localities for some of its lost real estate tax revenue, that reimbursement is often a fraction of the property's initial value. I believe this proposed wildlife refuge will negatively impact Venango County because local school districts rely on property taxes to fund public education; and local governments rely on property tax revenue to serve their residents through public works and other uses.

Like so many other local residents, we are outdoorsman who believe French Creek is a community treasure. Therefore, we would like to encourage USFWS to consider alternative options to new federal ownership and regulations on private land. Local organizations have already demonstrated their ability to fulfill USFWS's desired goals and successfully serve the needs of both the human and natural communities, all while providing, sustainable management, long-term conservation, and keeping the land productive.

French Creek has benefitted from extensive private conservation efforts by local organizations in recent decades. That, in part, has twice led French Creek to be named Pennsylvania's "River of the Year" by the Pennsylvania Organization for Watersheds and Rivers, most recently in 2022. Therefore, we would encourage USFWS to assist local organizations in a collective conservation effort that benefits both our environment and our economy.

In the months since the proposal for the French Creek National Wildlife Refuge was announced, our office has heard from numerous local residents who are opposed to the plan. We share the concerns of our constituents who remain unsettled about the potential impact an expansive wildlife refuge will have not only on our local government's ability to perform basic public services; but especially with the large-scale land ownership of private property by the federal government in Northwest Pennsylvania.

Therefore, we strongly believe the USFWS should reconsider the proposed French Creek National Wildlife Refuge and leave the agency's stated goals of protecting French Creek, one of our region's most important natural resources, to the local organizations and landowners who are already doing that work.

We appreciate USFWS's commitment to French Creek's future and to our region. We look forward to hearing from you and working with you on this matter as we move forward.

Sincerely,



Samuel H. Breene  
Venango County Commissioner



Michael C. Dulaney  
Venango County Commissioner



Albert "Chip" Abramovic  
Venango County Commissioner